

A Study on the Support for Core Competency of Korean Students in Collegiate Level

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1. Introduction

K-CESA (Korea Collegiate Essential Skills Assessment) project aims to develop the standardized evaluation tool for assessment of the level of basic job skills, which students acquire from the college education. There are some skills to be regarded more important, and they are called as core competencies, specifically for the competency in the labor market. Core competency is the concept that has been highlighted in the field of higher education and Human Resource Development because of the generalization of higher education and the environmental shifts around the education and labor market. K-CESA has been developed, distributed, and examined from 2009 to 2014, and the purpose of this study is to critically examine the performances of K-CESA project and suggest some solutions for enhancement of the core competencies of Korean students in collegiate level.

2. Review of Literature

Discussion on the concept of core competency can be categorized as three approaches: competency development in the business, lifelong competency which was led by OECD, and basic job skills for general employees. Specifically, core competency needs to be emphasized in the shift to information society and the generalization of higher education.

K-CESA consists of six categories of core competency: Social Skill, Comprehensive Thinking, Communication, Self Management, Global Competency, and Resource, Information, and Technology Utilization. The questions for evaluation and online assessment system have been established, and the students started to participate to the assessment from 2010. K-CESA project is meaningful in the point of encouraging the similar studies and suggesting the implications

for the curriculum for college in Korea as the first standardized assessment tool for core competency.

3. Performance and Challenges for K-CESA

The number of colleges for K-CESA increased steadily from 37 colleges in 2010 to 176 colleges in 2014, and the number of students also increased from 24,326 in 2010 to 36,152 in 2014. According to the survey on the professional educator group and the working group for K-CESA and ACE project, it proves that K-CESA is a practical tool for assessing students' core competency, evaluating the performance of government funding programs, and examining the outcome of curriculum of each college.

Even if K-CESA shows several advantages, there are also some challenges based on the survey. Above all, the concept of core competency that can be accepted universally is not yet defined. Therefore, the validity and reliability of the questions, the stability and quality of the online system, plagiarism in the assessing process, and the attitude of participants are addressed as the limitations of K-CESA.

4. Case Study for K-CESA

According to the survey of K-CESA, colleges actively discuss the core competency, try to develop assessment tool of their own, and reform the curriculum based on the core competency. However, it should be paid attention that the government funding is the most powerful motivation for participating in the assessment of core competency. Defining and developing core competency can be one of the ambiguous tasks for each school, therefore, sharing best practices would be helpful for the schools to discuss core competency.

In this study, Dongguk University and Cheonbuk University are suggested as the best practices for developing core competency in collegiate level. Those two schools are characterized in establishing a specialized organization and manpower for core competency, defining core competencies based on their own ideal model of student, developing their own assessment tool, combining K-CESA for comparison, and reforming curriculums based on these comprehensive approaches. Specifically, sharing the process of resolving the challenges in the early stage of core competency development would be a best reference for other schools.

5. Implications

Based on the literature review and survey result, implications and suggestions for policy making is like as follows: 1) government funding needs to be connected with the practical development of curriculum based on the core competency, 2) K-CESA assessment tool should be improved in further, 3) Core competency and K-CESA needs to be aligned with NCS (National Competency Standards), 4) interdisciplinary approaches for K-CESA needs to be activated, 5) developing core competencies of the students in non- capital region should be encouraged, 6) core competency needs to be connected with the career development, and 7) counselling for core competency should be supported for establishing infrastructure of core competency development.